



co—existence

or

PRO—existence



by THOMAS A. DAVIS

OF THE GREAT stream of information and ideas that flows endlessly from the world's communication media, most of which are quickly lost in the ever-changing ocean of human thought, there are occasionally some ideas that deserve to be rescued from oblivion, if but for a moment, and given a second notice. One such came to our attention recently which we want to share with our readers.

In a speech made in New York City some time ago, Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, erstwhile general secretary of the World Council of Churches, called for an attitude of "pro-existence" rather than "co-existence." "As I move across the world and see the tensions existing between nations and races," said Dr. Visser 't Hooft, "I see that co-existence is far too negative a concept to really save us."

In making a call for humanity to practise "pro-existence," the Doctor stated, "Pro-existence says, 'I am my brother's keeper' . . . it is the refusal to write off any other man, nation or race. It is a pretty good word to summarize the kind of attitude the Bible wants us to take."

It is perhaps too much to expect that Dr. Visser 't Hooft's suggestion will make any impression at all upon the course of world politics, or any lasting impression upon many individuals. For—let's face it—both as nations and individuals we are altogether too selfish,

too indifferent to others, for that. But there are always a few people. . . .

Let's take a look at the two concepts, co-existence and pro-existence. (You won't find the latter word in your dictionary; Dr. Visser 't Hooft probably coined it.) Co-existence simply means "existing together or in conjunction." It suggests that circumstances have thrown nations or individuals together, and they might as well make the best of it. We get the idea of a mere tolerance and a grudging admission that the other fellow has some rights too.

It takes but a moment's reflection to realize that, by this definition, much of mankind hasn't even begun to co-exist yet. Guns booming and rockets rattling around the world testify to this.

As Dr. Visser 't Hooft used the prefix *pro*, in pro-existence, it means, for; he is talking about an existing for other nations and people. And here he touches upon one of the God-given laws of life which is violated as much as any "natural" law, as some would refer to it.

Commenting on this law, one widely-read author has said: "There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live. . . ."

We do not know whether Dr. Visser 't Hooft's word will ever get into a dictionary or not; it certainly deserves to. But we do hope that it will get into some minds and then begin to affect hearts. For in this hard, cold, calculating, clutching world we certainly need some who will practise pro-existence even more than co-existence. We need men and women who are not merely satisfied to "live and let live;" we need people who will "live and help live." This takes some sacrifice sometimes, some personal inconvenience, some taking of risk, some identifying of self with the problems and feelings of others. But the Christian may measure his closeness to God by the breadth of his sensitiveness to the sorrows and pains of others.

Someone has observed that nature says, love thyself; domestic education says, love your family; patriotism says, love your country; but Christianity says, love all mankind. The last is the definition of true pro-existence.

The catch is, of course, that the principle is not always practised. For it is easy to give it lip service, but a somewhat different matter to give it heart and hand service. But Dr. Visser 't Hooft's proposition of "pro-existence" deserves more than a mere notice. It merits a practical approach. How about some impetus from you and me? □

Signs of the Times 1968

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

When things go wrong, as they sometimes do,

And the sun is hid from view,

Just steal away to a quiet place

And pray the sunshine through.

Prayer can change a lot of things;

It can turn the night to day,

And bring the blessing from above

When you steal away and pray.

Your life will have some storm clouds,

But God's promises are true;

When the shadows cross your pathway,

You can pray the sunshine through.

God has promised to be with you

Though you cannot see your way.

He can change the storm to sunshine

When you steal away to pray.

—Lena McMinn.